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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL SOCHA HEARS CONCERNS ABOUT RUSSIA

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffdel Socha visited Kyiv February 19 and 20 to explore questions of regional security, Euro-Atlantic integration, and the effects of the financial crisis. Ukrainian officials emphasized concerns about Russia's more assertive foreign policy and the threat this poses to Ukraine. The GOU is preparing its Annual National Program with NATO for submission by late April. End Summary.

NSDC: Don't Forget Ukraine

2. (C) Senate Foreign Relations Committee senior staff member Christopher Socha (office of Jim DeMint, R, NC) visited Kyiv February 19 and 20. He met with Acting Head of the International Relations Department of the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC), Volodomyr Ivanov. Ivanov highlighted concerns about Russian assertiveness. He wondered whether a "new model" of US-Russian relations would work to Ukraine's disadvantage. He urged the US not to allow Ukraine to be used as a "bargaining chip," lest Ukraine slip into the Russian sphere. Ivanov suggested that a new mechanism to manage US-Ukraine relations was needed. He harkened back to the Kuchma-Gore Commission as a model. The key thing is to maintain regular contacts at senior levels, he said.

3. (C) Asked if the August war in Georgia had changed Ukrainians' perceptions of a Russian threat, Ivanov said poll numbers in Russia show that increasing numbers of Russians regard Ukraine as unfriendly, but there is not much evidence of a similar change in attitude among Ukrainians. Within the Ukrainian government, however, Ivanov told Socha that awareness of Ukraine's vulnerability to potential Russian threats and to Russian influence has increased, along with concern about Russia's politicization of most aspects of its relationship with Ukraine. Ivanov underlined the importance of the 1994 Bucharest Memorandum under which the U.S. and Russia gave guarantees to Ukraine in return for its de-nuclearization. Ivanov said Ukraine needs a new guarantee. The START Treaty should be extended or a new one put in its place, but Ukraine should be part of the process.

4. (C) Turning to Crimea, Ivanov observed that the situation is not analogous to South Ossetia. Crimea has not declared independence, is far bigger than South Ossetia, shares a history and strong economic ties with Ukraine, and has considerable public opinion that supports remaining in Ukraine. Furthermore, he believes that the international reaction to any Russian military action in Crimea would be far greater and Russia knows that. Ivanov noted that nearly all of Crimea's water and electricity come from Ukraine. Nonetheless, the destabilizing nature of Russia's massive propaganda campaign in Crimea and in eastern Ukraine is

troubling. Given the large number of retired Black Sea Fleet servicemen in Crimea, there is a ready market for Russian nationalist propaganda.

¶15. (C) On Afghanistan, Ivanov said he believes Russia is serious about stability. Instability in Afghanistan does not serve Russian interests. That said, getting the US out of Manas was a great way to show who is boss in Central Asia. Ivanov said that Ukraine would not speak against a U.S. or NATO base in the region, including in the Caucasus, to supply Afghanistan. However, he predicted a very negative Russian reaction.

Ministry of Defense: the Threat of Russian Influence

¶16. (C) At the Ministry of Defense, Socha explored defense reform issues, in particular the effects of Ukraine's budget problems, and the Ministry's views on Russia's role in the region with Military Policy and Strategic Planning Deputy Director Colonel Polischuk and Head of Euro-atlantic Integration Section Lt. Colonel Kovalenko. Polischuk noted that exchange rate losses since September contributed to a fifty percent reduction in the MoD's budget. In the current environment, MoD must focus on the most essential tasks: retaining key personnel and maintaining the current readiness levels of the joint Rapid Reaction forces. He noted that President Yushchenko hopes to increase the number of Ukrainian troops in or contributing to operations in Afghanistan. There may be reductions in levels in Kosovo, however. Polishchuk stressed the importance at this time of maintaining NATO's full open door policy.

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¶17. (C) Turning to Russia, Polischuk listed the following concerns at MoD: Russia's determination to maintain forces in Transnistria and Russian encouragement of a trilateral dialogue on Transnistria that excludes Ukraine, the EU, and the U.S.; recent Russian-Belarusian joint military exercises that did not exclude an invasion scenario; Russia's CFE withdrawal, which Ukraine recognizes as an unfriendly action; and the impending expiration of START and the unlikely chance that Russia would reconfirm the 1994 trilateral agreement, now that Ukraine is a non-nuclear state.

¶18. (C) Polischuk went on to describe the map as MoD sees it: Russian forces within easy reach of Ukraine's southwest border (and Odessa) in Transnistria; Russian forces in Crimea; Russian forces along Ukraine's entire eastern border and much of its northern border; and Belarussian and/or Russian forces on Ukraine's north-northwest border. This is, he continued, the environment that MoD will have in mind as it holds its Strategic Defense Review. Ukraine will make every effort to conduct it according to international and NATO standards. Summing up his comments, Polischuk noted that open conflict would split Ukraine in half and must be avoided. However, in the Ministry's opinion, Russian influence on different parts of Ukrainian society is the biggest strategic threat to Ukraine's security.

MFA on NATO

¶19. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Director for NATO affairs Vadym Prystaiko noted the difficulties that MFA has had in coordination the Annual National Program (ANP) within the GOU. Prystaiko said that anti-NATO critics in the Ukrainian government demanded to know what Ukraine would get in return for continuing to alienate Russia when NATO had no intention of moving Ukraine toward membership in the near or mid-term.

Vice PM's Chief of Staff on Financial Crisis, Yushchenko

¶10. (C) Chief of Staff to Deputy Prime Minister Nemyria, Ihor Zhovka, told Socha the Prime Minister believes Ukraine can weather the financial crisis if it receives EBRD and World Bank sectoral project funding in addition to the IMF standby facility. According to Zhovka, negotiations on the Association Agreement with the EU are well advanced. However, Yushchenko made a mistake by promising the Ukraine-EU Free Trade Agreement would be complete by the end of 2009. This will not be possible. (Note: the FTA is an integral component of the Association Agreement.)

¶11. (C) Zhovka went on to focus criticism on President Yushchenko's handling of Euro-Atlantic policy issues, blaming him for causing late submission of Ukraine's Annual Target Plan, which, Zhovka told Socha, was returned by Yushchenko to the Cabinet of Ministers with edits after the deadline in Brussels in late 2008. However, the situation is now resolved. Ukraine will now turn to its Annual National Program document, and should have a draft ready by late April.

¶12. (U) Staffdel Socha did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

TAYLOR